Determinants of tourist attitudes toward local food and intentions to visit a destination: A case study from Iran

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the predictors of tourist attitudes towards local food along with intentions to visit a destination. This study is of great interest to research tourism in Iran. Specifically, it is the first to examine the impact of belief and familiarity as psychological factors on tourist attitudes towards local food and intentions to visit a destination. The sample consisted of 200 Iranian tourists visiting the city of Lahijan. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and structural equation modelling and the findings recognized familiarity as the most influential factor affecting attitudes toward local food, followed by epistemic, emotional, health and prestige value as well as food neophobia. However, interaction value, price and taste are not associated with attitudes towards local food. The article offers practical marketing strategies for tourism marketeers regarding the important determinants of intentions to visit a destination. This research can help authorities in charge of business promotion as to what is more likely to attract tourists and their use of tourism resources.

KEYWORDS

consumption value, food neophobia, attitudes, local food, destination visiting

1. Introduction

Food is a critical and obligatory component of tourists' travel experience (Stone et al., 2018) and it is proven that foods offer benefits such as pleasure and entertainment and help in the understanding of a new culture and new people (Hegarty & O'Mahony, 2001) as local food is special and important for attracting tourists. The unique aspects of local cooking in terms of taste, history, nutritional and associated cultural values add to its appeal, and trying local food is important for tourists to have a good time, making them want to come back again. Foods of a particular area represent domestic, geographical and individual identity and improve the destination image while consumption value is an essential concept in consumer behavior and marketing research. It is important to understand the potential actions of tourists to discern how local food practices affect its value and several empirical studies have attempted to define its nature in terms of definition and dimensionality (Chang et al., 2011; Mak et al., 2017). The theory of consumption value (TCV) is one of the most widely used models to explain consumer choices (Sheth et al., 1991) and consumer behavior identifies TCV as a valuable theory that can be applied dynamically and widely to analyze the concept (Mason et al., 2023).

This framework can be utilized to analyze purchasing patterns in food consumption and tourist products (Dash et al., 2023).

Several studies have applied the concept of food TCV to predict tourists' attitudes toward local food, which in turn affects behavioral intentions (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020; Soltani et al., 2021). Different factors related to food, such as motivation (Kim et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2013), have been examined and food-related personality characteristics have been introduced as a key factor in food choices with researchers also explaining the relationship between food neophobia and food choice (Eertmans et al., 2005). However, there is a lack of an integrative model that considers personal and psychological factors.

Familiarity is one of the psychological factors that affects consumption behavior. Tourists are often willing to try unfamiliar local foods but such foods are often accompanied by uncertainty and risk. Food neophobia can cause tourists to be afraid of trying new foods, so they end up eating the same things all the time which stops them from experiencing different tastes. Some studies have looked at how tourists' preferences affects their behavior as knowing something well and being comfortable with it is one of the things that can affect how tourists choose what to buy and do. Tourists often want to try new and unfamiliar foods from the local area, however, when it comes to trying new foods in a different place, there is usually a feeling of not being sure and the potential danger involved (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Sometimes, tourists prefer to eat foods that they are already familiar with. However, not many studies have looked at psychological factors that affect how people feel about local food and their willingness to take action (Chang et al., 2010).

In Iran, promoting regional and local tourism is an effective way to support and develop the agricultural sectors of the local economy. This can be achieved by preserving culture and adding value to the business community while expanding and enhancing regional and local tourism resources (Akhavan et al., 2020). This study specializes in the tourism region of Lahijan, which is located in Iran's Gilan province, a popular tourist destination due to its diverse landscapes, including weathered mountain ranges, green forests, interesting folklore and unique local cuisine. Therefore, this study is among the first to examine the impact of consumption value, psychological factors and food neophobia on attitudes towards local food and behavioral intentions; it especially uncovers how belief and familiarity act as predictors of tourists' attitudes towards local food.

The rest of this article is divided into sections: first the theoretical background of the study is discussed, then the methodology and results are presented; the final part includes discussion and conclusions.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Food tourism in Iran

Culinary tourism aims to educate and encourage food lovers which can be achieved by participating in cultural immersion in selected locations around the world. Culinary tours can include activities related to cooking, food tasting and culinary trends. In addition to restaurant weeks in different cities, culinary events and cooking competitions, culinary tourism has a lot to offer (Sharbatian & Mireskandari, 2014). Lahijan is one of the most important cities in Gilan Province which itself borders the Caspian Sea to its north. With beautiful landscapes and natural attractions, the city is considered one of the main tourist destinations in the country and its district including Rudbaneh has a population of 168,829. Of the total population, 97,697 live in urban areas, and 71,132 in rural areas. The main local foods of Lahijan include morgh, fesenjan, alo-mosamma polo, baghlaghatogh, mirzaghasemi, sabziko ku ku, aash, shole zard and reshteh khoshkar (Payandeh et al., 2022).

Theory of consumption value (TCV) and tourists' behavior

Consumer choice behavior is influenced by different types of consumption value (functional, emotional, social and epistemic) according to TCV, with each type having a different impact in a different situation. The value of consumption means the satisfaction or usefulness that a person gets from using a product and the idea has been used to study how people enjoy food when they travel (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). The concept of consumption value has been applied to food consumption in tourism. Earlier research has described functional value as that related to the quality, price or any other practical feature of a product or service (Perrea et al., 2015). It is important for tourists to have good food and enjoy its taste while dining, as this helps in creating positive attitudes. Additionally, when tourists look at food choices they must make sure that it will not make them ill, so the healthiness of the food is very important to consider (Kim et al., 2010). Price is another important aspect of functional value. Customers who think that the restaurants have fair prices, start to like the food that the restaurants serve (Lai, 2015). Emotional value means the joy and fun that come from tourism activities (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001) while regarding social value, individuals choose products that reflect the norms of their friends and convey the social image they wish to project (Williams et al., 2015). Goolaup and Mossberg (2016) explained that when tourists have meals with their friends and family, it is an important part of the holiday experience. Curiosity, new things and wanting to learn are seen as important for gaining knowledge and regarded as epistemic value

(Sheth et al., 1991). Tourists enjoy trying local food because it is new and exciting for them and it helps to fulfill their desire for something different (Perrea et al., 2015). Theory of consumption value is very relevant in the food tourism context as it recognizes the multidimensional structure of consumer value and provides several dimensions for measuring it in the hospitality field (Babin et al., 1994). There are a few important things that affect how people feel about something, including the kind of meals they have, and especially how the food tastes (Torres, 2002). Health value is an important factor of consumption value, price is another. Lai (2015) found that value-conscious customers who think Hong Kong tea restaurants provide good value for money are also happy customers who build positive attitudes towards the food offered. Many tourists like to try local food when they think it is cheaper than they thought it would be (Yee, 2015). Emotional value has a direct impact on consumer evaluations of tourism products (Hyun et al., 2011). Research shows that people who find emotional value in something are happier and more likely to go back to an ethnic restaurant (Ha & Jang, 2010) as tourists are hoping to feel happy and fulfilled by trying local food. Other research reveals that emotional value is the most influential predictor of consumer behavior (Mason et al., 2023).

Prestige value is an important variable in hospitality and tourism (Perrea et al., 2015), it is thought prestigious to eat at a nearby restaurant. Sharing food with friends at a place can also show how popular and important you are while the way people talk and connect with each other during a trip is important for building relationships (Williams & Soutar, 2009). Epistemic value is another important factor. Researchers have proved that meaning plays a crucial role in the way people feel about tourism and shown that there is a connection between epistemic value and behavioral intentions (Thomé et al., 2019). When tourists try food from a different place, they can learn about its culture so it provides epistemic value for them (Ha & Jang, 2013). In another study, Choe and Kim (2018) confirmed the relevance of quality/taste, cognitive and emotional value in predicting attitudes toward local food and behavior. Rousta and Jamshidi (2020) and Basami et al. (2020) found significant results for quality, reputation, taste, emotion, price and health. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_{1a}: There is a significant relationship between taste value and tourist attitudes towards local food.

H_{1b}: There is a significant relationship between health value and tourist attitudes towards local food.

H_{1c}: There is a significant relationship between price value and tourist attitudes towards local food.

H_{1d}: There is a significant relationship between emotional value and tourist attitudes towards local food.

H_{1e}: There is a significant relationship between prestige value and tourist attitudes towards local food.

H_{1f}: There is a significant relationship between interaction value and tourist attitudes towards local food.

H_{1g}: There is a significant relationship between epistemic value and tourist attitudes towards local food.

Psychological factors

In consumer behavior, psychological variables are very important concepts affecting individual decision-making. Researchers have explored whether belief has a direct impact on behavioral intentions and according to a study, motivation, familiarity and personality have a direct impact on dietary behavior (Choshaly & Tih, 2015).

Belief

Belief is another important psychological factor in consumer behavior, meaning an understanding possessed by a person without any justification. Belief has been identified as an important predictor of sustainable tourism (Choshaly & Mirabolghasemi, 2019). Another study showed that beliefs significantly influence consumer confidence towards eco-labeled products (Choshaly & Tih, 2015). Choshaly and Tih (2017) found that when people strongly believe in environmental causes, they are more likely to want to buy products that have been labeled as eco-friendly. In one study, belief in online advertising had a direct influence on consumer attitudes towards such advertising, which in turn impacts consumer behavior (Wang & Sun, 2010). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_{2a}: There is a significant relationship between belief and tourist attitudes towards local food.

Familiarity

Familiarity can be defined and measured in two approaches. One focuses on how much an individual really knows about the product, and the other focuses on perceived familiarity (Park & Stoel, 2005). Familiarity with foods will increase food acceptance or rejection (Tourila et al., 2001). In the study of online advertising (Wang & Sun, 2010) not only belief but familiarity had a direct influence on consumer attitudes. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_{2b}: There is a significant relationship between familiarity and tourist attitudes towards local food.

Personality traits

Food-related personality traits are defined as an important factor that affects decisions regarding food. Personality traits are important predictors of attitudes (Cohen & Avieli, 2004) and studies suggested that food neophobia is an important predictor for tourist attitudes toward destinations (Ritchey et al., 2003).

A neophobic tendency means that people naturally do not like or are suspicious of new and unfamiliar foods but on the other hand, a neophilic tendency means that people like to try out new and unfamiliar foods (Rozin & Rozin, 1981). Food neophobia is negatively related to food consumption (Mak et al., 2017) and empirical research has indicated that tourists with a high level of food neophobia are not interested in local food consumption (Wu et al., 2016). Ji et al. (2016) have proven a negative correlation between tourists' neophobia and their local food consumption intentions. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that:

H$_3$: There is a significant negative relationship between food neophobia and tourist attitudes towards local food.

Attitude and behavioral intention
Behavioral intention is defined as the desire to participate in and consume a product or service in the future (Han & Hyun, 2017). Tourism studies suggest that tourist attitudes and destination image influence their intention to choose or return to a destination (Lee et al., 2019). Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) introduced and defined attitudes as a learned disposition that always responds favorably or adversely to something particular. Attitudes are considered in this study as a person's positive or negative feelings towards local food while several studies have shown positive associations between attitudes and behavioral intentions (Lai & Li, 2005).
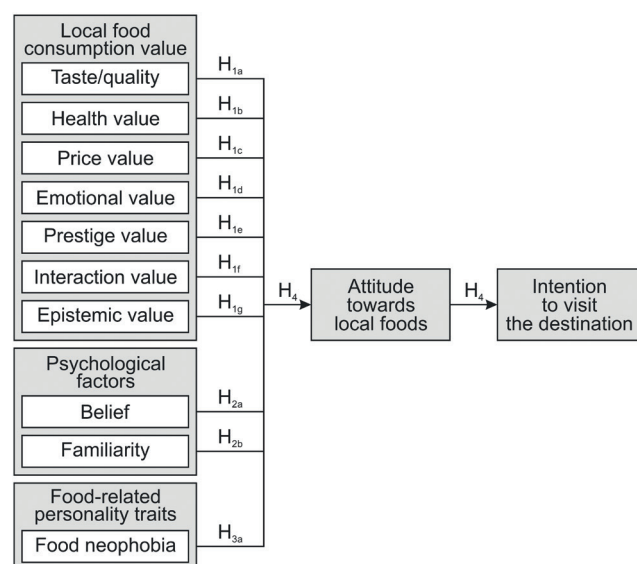

Figure 1. Conceptual research framework
Source: author

Another study indicated that there is a positive relationship between attitudes and eco-friendly behavior (Lee & Moscardo, 2005) while a positive link between attitude and intention to select or revisit a destination has been demonstrated as well (Huang & Hsu, 2009).

In a study by Phillips et al. (2013), it was found that diners' positive attitudes toward Korean food influenced and encouraged them to visit Korea (Choe & Kim, 2018). Accordingly, it is hypothesized that:

H$_4$: The attitude of tourists towards local food is positively related to their intention to visit a destination.

The research framework (Figure 1) illustrates what will be examined in this research.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, a descriptive research design was employed which explains the existing situation instead of interpreting it or making judgments (Rossi et al., 2013). "[A] descriptive survey is a suitable method when knowledge of a phenomenon is not too underdeveloped, the variables and the context can be described in detail and the objective is to understand to what extent a given relationship is present" (Zheng, 2020, p. 16). This study also utilizes a nonprobability sampling technique that is convenience sampling which is usually used for collecting a large amount of data (Wacker, 1998). Therefore, a structured questionnaire was used to measure the constructs and the variables were measured using scales adapted from previous literature – presented in Table 1. The variables of consumption value, attitudes and intentions were measured using 29, 4, and 3 items, respectively, and all items were adapted from Choe and Kim (2018). For the variables of belief and familiarity, nine and two items have been used, adapted from Sabbe et al. (2008). For variable food neophobia, 10 items were adapted from Fenko et al. (2015). A 5-point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5) was used to measure the items. In order to calculate the total sample size, G*Power was used (Faul et al., 2009). The results of a priori analysis are shown in Figure 2, which shows that a minimum sample size of 184 respondents will be needed for this analysis (Seltman, 2018).

Table 1. Questionnaire

Factor	Statements
Taste	I think the food is tasty
	I think the food provides appealing flavors
	I think the food provides a variety of ingredients
	I think the food provides good quality ingredients
	I think the food provides a high standard of quality
Health	I think the food provides good nutrition
	I think the food makes me healthy

			Familiarity	I like the food that I have eaten since I visited here
Health (cont.)	I think the food is hygienic			I only consume food that I am familiar with
	I think the food is safe			I am only familiar with the food that resembles the food that I tried before in Lahijan
Price	I think the food is reasonably priced			I only would eat food that resembles the food of Lahijan
	I think the food offers value for money		Food neophobia	I am constantly sampling new and different foods
Emotional	I think the food makes me feel excited			I do not trust new foods
	I think the food gives me pleasure			If I do not know what is in a food, I won't try it
	I think the food makes me feel happy			I like foods from different countries
	I think the food changes my mood positively			Ethnic food looks too weird to eat
	I think the food makes me crave it			In the future, I will try a new food
	I think that I am fascinated by the food			I am afraid to eat things I have never had before
Prestige	I think eating well-known food gives me prestige			I am very particular about the foods I will eat
	I think I have higher social status when eating well-known the food			I will eat almost anything
	I think that it is worth showing pictures of the food experiences to others			I would like to try new restaurants in the future
	I think that eating the food gives me a chance to show off the food experiences to others		Attitude	I think the food is very good
Interaction	I think that eating the food helps me to interact with the people I travel with			I think the food is very favorable
	I think that my friendship or kinship with my travel companion has increased while eating the food together			I think the food is very positive
Epistemic	I think that I learned the dining habits through the food experiences		Intention	I would like to revisit Lahijan to explore more foods
	I think that my knowledge of the culture has increased			I would like to travel to Lahijan for food
	I think that eating the food is a good opportunity for me to learn new things			I would like to come back to Lahijan to enjoy the food
	I think that I am more curious about the food			
	I think that I want to seek out more information about the food			
	I think that I want to try more diverse the food			
Belief	This food has a pleasant taste			
	This food has the desirable color			
	This food has a pleasant smell			
	This food has an attractive appearance			
	I will consume this food because I am sure that this food will not cause harm to my body			
	This food does not contain something that endangers my stomach			
	The origin of this foods and the way it is prepared makes it appealing			
	Any dish that contained the tiniest amount of this food would be appealing			
	This food creates a pleasant feeling in my stomach			
	Eating this food does not make me nauseous			

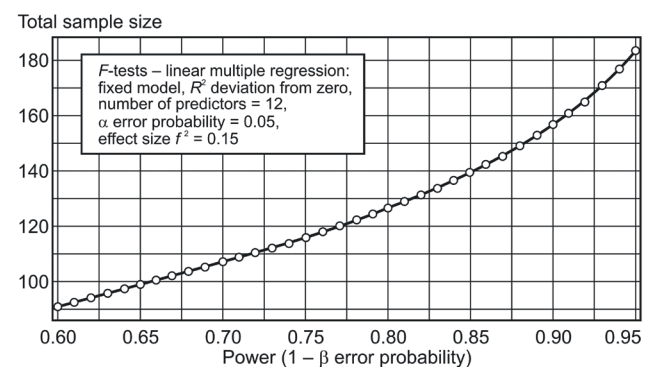Source: author based on: Almli et al. (2013), Muhammad et al. (2016), and Choe (2017).

Figure 2. Total sample size
Source: author

The area in this study is Lahijan City, which is located in Gilan Province. Lahijan has several tourist attractions and Figure 3 shows its geographical location and the area of the study.
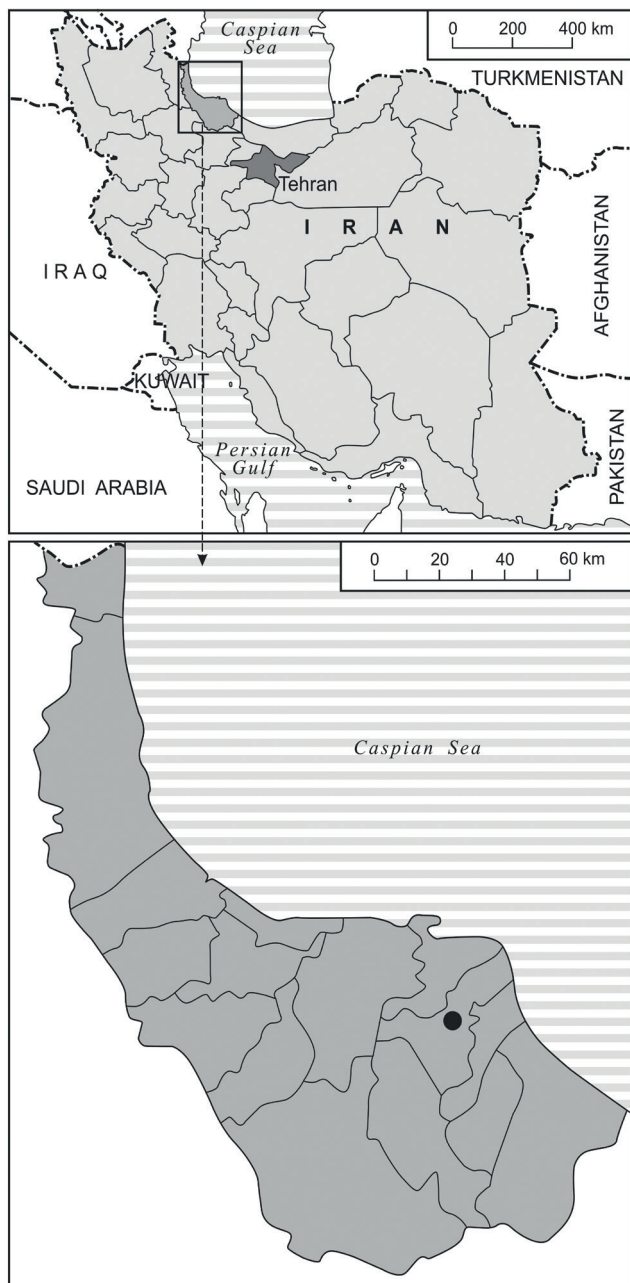
Figure 3. Map of Iran showing geographical location of Gilan province and the study area of Lahijan district
Source: author

From April to June 2022, the survey was carried out conducted by researchers and students at various tourist attractions in Lahijan, including Sheytan Kooh (Devil Mountain), Lahijan Pool and Bame Sabzz (Green Roof of Lahijan). These areas were selected because there were a lot of local restaurants in which tourists selected to dine. The survey contained two screening questions: "Was the food of Lahijan one of the main motivations for your visit?" and "Was it an important part of your trip to experience the foo d of Lahijan?". When respondents reacted negatively to both questions, they were removed from the study and 200 completed questionnaires were received.

4. RESULTS

4.1. PROFILES OF THE RESPONDENTS

Based on Table 2, it can be stated that the majority of the respondents were female (55%). The age groups were as follows: aged below 20 (10%), 21–30 (35%), 31–40 (35%), 41–50 (10%), and more than 50 (10%). The majority were business owners (40%) or employed (33%). Those with undergraduate and postgraduate degrees made up 37% and 36%, respectively and most held incomes of 4 to 6 million Tomans (79%). The largest group of respondents (34%) have visited Lahijan 3 to 5 times a year.

Table 2. Demographic information of survey respondents

Demographic		Frequency (*n* = 200)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	90	45
	Female	110	55
Age	<21	20	10
	21–30	70	35
	31–40	70	35
	41–50	20	10
	>50	20	10
Work	Student	19	9
	Employed	67	33
	Business owner	81	40
	Unemployed	33	16
Educa-tion	Postgraduate	72	36
	Undergraduate	75	37
	Diploma/certificate	40	20
	Other	13	6
Income	Below 1 million toman[a]	41	20
	1–3 million toman	53	26
	4–6 million toman	79	39
	Over 6 million toman	27	13
Number of visits to Lahijan in a year	Less than 2 times	34	17
	3 to 5 times	68	34
	6 to 10 times	66	33
	More than 10 times	32	16

[a] Toman is a super unit of the official currency of Iran, the rial: one toman is equivalent to 10,000 rials.
Source: author.

The next part of this study involved testing the model by using partial least squares (PLS) (Ringle et al., 2005). In order to avoid common method bias (CMB), full collinearity of variance inflation factors (VIFs) was tested (Liang et al., 2007). Based on the results in Table 3, CMB is not an issue as all VIFs values were less than 5 (Kock, 2017).

The first step in the use of the PLS-SEM is to draw a diagram that shows a well-organized representation of relationships. The PLS-SEM algorithm's output for this investigation is displayed in Figure 4.
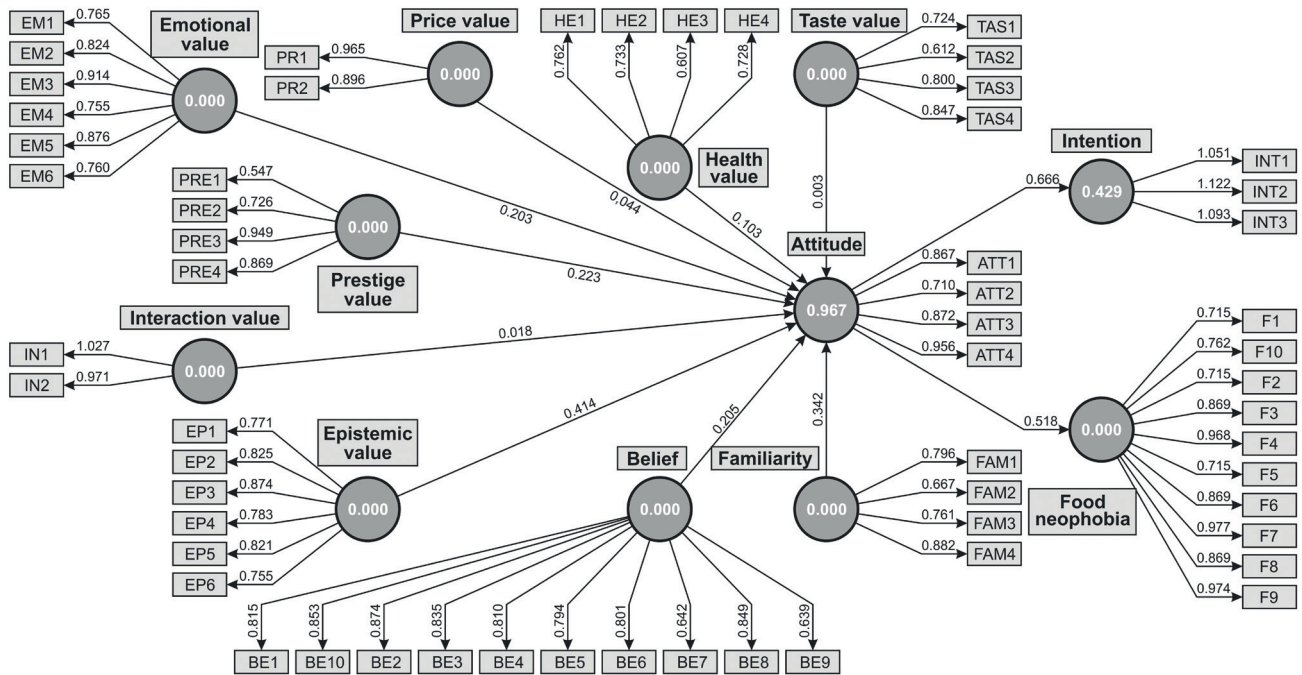
Figure 4. PLS-SEM algorithm
Source: author

Table 3. Full collinearity

Variables	Inner variance inflation factor (VIF) values	
	Attitudes towards local foods	Intention to visit the destination for food tourism
Taste value	1.088	0.000
Price value	2.044	0.000
Prestige value	4.711	0.000
Interaction value	2.530	0.000
Health value	2.127	0.000
Emotional value	3.198	0.000
Epistemic value	4.199	0.000
Belief	5.009	0.000
Familiarity	4.964	0.000
Food neophobia	4.668	0.000
Attitude	0.000	1.000

Source: author.

4.2. Evaluation of the measurement model

Reliability involves the degree to which repeated trials obtain identical results from a measurement process. In order to test the reliability of the model, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used: the Cronbach alpha ranged from 0.812 to 0.944 and the composite reliability from 0.802 to 1.000 which are adequate. For measuring convergent validity, the

average variance derived (AVE) was conducted and the results are presented in Table 4: the value for all constructs was greater than 0.5 which indicates strong convergent validity (Hair et al., 2014). Therefore, the model has adequate reliability and convergent validity.

Table 4. Results of reliability and convergent validity tests

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance derived (AVE)
Taste/quality	0.844	0.836	0.564
Health value	0.891	0.802	0.504
Price value	0.817	0.929	0.867
Emotional value	0.920	0.923	0.669
Prestige value	0.812	0.863	0.620
Interaction value	0.873	1.000	0.999
Epistemic value	0.912	0.917	0.649
Belief	0.939	0.950	0.635
Familiarity	0.821	0.861	0.609
Food neophobia	0.953	0.962	0.722
Attitudes towards local foods	0.853	0.916	0.733
Intention to visit the destination for food tourism	0.944	1.000	1.186

Source: author.

Table 5. Results of the Fornell-Larcker criterion test

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Taste/quality	0.784	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Health value	0.475	0.710	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Price value	0.608	0.514	0.931	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Emotional value	0.674	0.765	0.563	0.818	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Prestige value	0.730	0.653	0.411	0.802	0.787	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Interaction value	0.601	0.528	0.505	0.725	0.721	0.999	–	–	–	–	–	–
Epistemic value	0.647	0.515	0.546	0.670	0.739	0.610	0.806	–	–	–	–	–
Belief	0.687	0.553	0.538	0.744	0.657	0.712	0.801	0.797	–	–	–	–
Familiarity	0.635	0.481	0.609	0.633	0.771	0.565	0.800	0.747	0.780	–	–	–
Food neophobia	0.737	0.525	0.503	0.674	0.651	0.633	0.799	0.732	0.769	0.850	–	–
Attitudes towards local foods	0.230	0.475	0.608	0.674	0.780	0.601	0.647	0.787	0.735	0.837	0.856	–
Intention to visit the destination for food tourism	0.655	0.310	0.731	0.504	0.433	0.511	0.562	0.557	0.643	0.556	0.655	1.089

Source: author.

For measuring discriminant validity, AVE is calculated, and the square root of AVE was bigger than the connections between variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Based on the results of Table 5, the discriminant validity was suitable in this study.

4.3. Results of testing the structural model

The structural model is checked when the construction steps are deemed effective and correct which involves looking at how the different parts work together and how well the model can predict. Checking the structural model will help researchers to see if the data supports the ideas in the model (Urbach & Ahlemann, 2010). The results from the structural model are shown in Table 6.

According to Table 6, health value ($\beta = 0.103$; $t = 3.465$; $p < 0.000$), emotional value ($\beta = 0.203$; $t = 3.816$), prestige value ($\beta = 0.233$; $t = 2.742$), epistemic value ($\beta = 0.414$; $t = 3.827$), belief ($\beta = 0.205$; $t = 2.874$) and familiarity ($\beta = 0.342$; $t = 5.827$) are positively related to attitude. Food neophobia ($\beta = 0.518$; $t = 3.459$) is negatively related to attitude, while taste/quality value ($\beta = 0.019$; $t = 1.307$), price value ($\beta = 0.044$; $t = 1.881$) and interaction value ($\beta = 0.017$; $t = 0.696$) are not related to attitude. On the other hand, attitude ($\beta = 0.655$; $t = 11.902$) is positively

Table 6. Results of testing the structural model

Hypothesis	Path coefficient		p-value	t-value	Result
H_{1a}	Taste/quality → attitude	0.019	0.192	1.307	Not supported
H_{1b}	Health value → attitude	0.103	0.000	3.465**	Supported
H_{1c}	Price value → attitude	0.044	0.061	1.881	Not supported
H_{1d}	Emotional value → attitude	0.203	0.000	3.816**	Supported
H_{1e}	Prestige value → attitude	0.233	0.006	2.742**	Supported
H_{1f}	Interaction value → attitude	0.017	0.487	0.696	Not supported
H_{1g}	Epistemic value → attitude	0.414	0.000	3.827**	Supported
H_{2a}	Belief → attitude	0.205	0.004	2.874**	Supported
H_{2b}	Familiarity → attitude	0.342	0.000	5.827**	Supported
H_3	Food neophobia → attitude	−0.518	0.000	3.459**	Supported
H_4	Attitude → intention to visit	0.655	0.000	11.902**	Supported

Note: * $p < 0.05$, t-value greater than 1.645, ** $p < 0.01$; t-value greater than 2.33; R^2: 0.96 and 0.54.
Source: author.

related to a tourist's intention to visit the destination. Moreover, in order to examine in-sample predictive power, R^2 is calculated (Chin, 1998). Based on the R^2 value, 52% of variance in intention is explained by attitudes, and 96% of variance in attitude is explained by independent variables, which can be considered substantial according to Henseler et al. (2009).

5. Discussion

This research assessed the significant impact of consumption value, psychological factors and food neophobia on tourists' attitudes towards local food and their intention to visit a destination. According to the results, H_{1a} is not supported; this indicates that tourists who perceived high taste value did not have a positive attitude towards local food. This finding is not consistent with previous studies of Kim and Eves (2012) and Kivela and Crotts (2006). This may be because tourists do not care about having local food when they visit Lahijan, and they do not appreciate the value of trying local food. Marketeers and those who give food to others should make sure that the local food they offer is delicious and of really good quality. Supporting H_{1b}, tourists with high perceived health value have a positive attitude towards local food in Lahijan. This supports previous studies that proved that health value is positively related to attitudes towards local food (Kim et al., 2009; Sparks et al., 2003) indicating that health benefits and the cleanliness of local food should be communicated to tourists. Regarding H_{1c}, which was not supported, the finding indicates that there was inherently no favorable attitude towards local food in Lahijan for tourists with high price values. This finding is against previous studies that indicate tourists who perceive value for money are likely to generate a positive attitude towards food (Yee, 2015). Many of the tourists may have found local food prices expensive. Therefore, the local food service providers at a destination should provide a reasonable price for local food. Hypothesis 1d is also supported; this indicates that tourists with high emotional value had a positive attitude towards Lahijan's food. This is in line with other studies; the impact of emotional value on the customer assessment of a hospitality and tourism product has been shown (Babin et al., 1994; Ha & Jang, 2010) and during the eating out experience, tourists in Lahijan feel positive emotions. Supporting H_{1e}, the finding shows that tourists with high prestige value have a positive attitude towards local food, which supports previous researchers who have proved the positive relation between sharing local food-related memories and social status (Chang et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2009).

Surprisingly, H_{1f} was not supported, as the finding indicates that tourists placing a high value on interaction did not have a positive attitude towards Lahijan's local food. Compared to previous studies this outcome is somewhat unexpected (Williams et al., 2015) and shows that eating local foods in Lahijan with others did not increase tourists' friendship with their travel companions. Supporting H_{1g}, the finding indicates a positive relationship between epistemic value and attitudes towards local food consistent with previous studies showing that epistemic value is an important predictor of attitudes (Jang & Feng, 2007; Williams & Soutar, 2009). By experiencing Lahijan food, tourists who increased their awareness of Lahijan food culture formed positive attitudes towards it. Therefore, marketeers and food providers can learn new things and provide better food consumption experiences for tourists in Lahijan.

Supporting H_{2a}, the finding indicates that tourists with higher beliefs regarding local food had a favorable attitude towards it. This is in line with previous research that proved a positive relationship between beliefs and attitudes (Zacharia, 2003), therefore, marketeers and local food providers need to improve tourists' beliefs regarding the local food of Lahijan. Supporting H_{2a}, the finding indicates familiarity is positively related to attitudes towards local food and the results of the present study confirmed previous research indicating that familiarity affects attitudes and intentions (Sun & Wang, 2010). Therefore, marketeers and food providers need to provide foods more familiar to tourists. Hypothesis 3 is supported; the findings indicate that tourists are scared to eat new foods which aligns with previous studies that showed that being afraid to try new foods is linked to eating less food (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Eertmans et al., 2005). Supporting H_4, the study shows that tourists who have a positive opinion of local food are more likely to want to visit a destination for food tourism agreeing with previous research which says that attitudes have a positive effect on how tourists act (Phillips et al., 2013; Ryu & Han, 2010). When tourists like the local food in Lahijan, they think of it as a good place to try different foods, tell other people and might come back to visit again in the future.

6. Conclusion

Food is recognized as an important factor in tourists' experiences, and knowing tourists' wants is very important in the hospitality business, requiring more academic investigation (Santich, 2007). This study has examined the impact of consumption value, psychological factors and food neophobia on tourists' attitudes and intentions to visit a destination. It differs

from previous research as it is the first attempt to examine the impact of psychological factors on tourists' attitudes and intentions. Based on the findings, familiarity is the most influential factor affecting attitudes toward local food, followed by epistemic value, emotional value, health value, food neophobia and prestige value. On the other hand, interaction, price and taste values are not related to attitudes which are recognized as an important predictor of a tourist's intentions to visit a destination.

The results of this study offer theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this work expands the evidence for a theoretical relationship between consumption values, psychological factors and new-food phobia, to tourists' attitudes towards local cuisine and intention to visit a destination in Iran. Specifically, this study can serve as a basis for further research on the contribution of belief and familiarity on attitudes towards local cuisine and intentions to visit a destination in other countries. Practically, this research also has strong implications for a travel service provider in developing new travel experiences. Traders should advertise local foods, emphasizing their consumption value. This helps local producers improve the overall quality of local food, taking into account factors such as epistemic value, emotional value, health value, food neophobia and prestige value. Marketeers should implement strategies to provide healthy and high-quality local food while restaurant owners in Lahijan should make sure that the food provided for tourists is healthy and safe. Local businesses need to emphasize that Lahijan food can bring happiness and positive moods and in order to improve epistemic value, local food businesses should offer chances to gain knowledge through eating local food. They can make smart decisions to help people become more familiar and less afraid of trying local foods.

Limitations and suggestions for future research
There are some limitations to this study. Firstly, it only used a designed questionnaire to collect data. Future studies can be examined by utilizing other sources like focus groups and interviews. Secondly, it was conducted on a sample of domestic tourists in Lahijan City, therefore, the results cannot be generalized to all tourists. This opens up interesting prospects for future research as tourism organizations and the media could use this opportunity to promote tourism in universal destinations. Third, convenience sampling techniques were used; future research could use cluster sampling. This study did not examine the impact of other variables on attitudes and the visiting intentions of tourists while a future study could also examine the mediating effect of attitude. Moreover, researchers could use other theories in examining intentions to visit a destination for food tourism.

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